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ABSTRACT

Noting that communication skills are important for the processing of understanding between individuals and within the individual, this paper describes a principle and skill approach to understanding the processes of communication as background for teaching a number of skills used in interpersonal communication. The skills discussed in the paper are (1) creation of meaning, (2) separation of worlds, (3) verification feedback, (4) listening skills, (5) speaking skills, (6) relationship assessment, (7) assessing states-of-being, (8) intrapersonal dimensions of being assessment, (9) relationship resolution, (10) conflict resolution, and (11) sense of timing. In addition to a description of each skill, the paper discusses the influence of the skill function on interaction and provides a structured laboratory exercise designed to develop the skill. The paper concludes that speech communication teachers can have an added influence on the quality of human life through the use of laboratory experience for communication skill development. (FL)

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USING A LABORATORY TO DEVELOP INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

The development of interpersonal communication skills is facilitated through the use of experientially structured laboratory exercises. A principle and skill approach to understanding the processes of communication is briefly described as background for thirteen major skills used in interpersonal relationships. The thirteen major skills have an influence on how the flow of stimuli within and between individuals leads to congruent and complete understandings of self, other and the environment. Each skill is briefly defined, the influence of the skill function on interaction is described, and the structured laboratory exercise is explained. The skills in communication are ones that have the same influence on the interaction in varied situations. Speech communication teachers can have an added influence on the quality of human life through the use of laboratory experiences for communication skill development.

Using a Laboratory to Develop Interpersonal Communication Skills

Skills are one of the critical qualities of interpersonal communication. The best of "intents" do not take the place of skills during interactions. An experiential approach to teaching communication skills has been suggested by several individuals (e.g., Hall, et al., 1975; Pace, 1977; Strong, 1981). A three phase approach to teaching/learning communication skills (Strong, 1981) has in phase II the structured laboratory experiences as a major part for assimilation of principles and skills. Several skills were identified and systematically programmed to help individuals gain a deeper insight into process while increasing efficiency in the use of the skill.

This paper will present thirteen major skills that are used in interaction. Four of these skills will have some video presentation to help illustrate the skill involvement in the interpersonal communication. However, before looking directly at the thirteen skills a brief conceptual framework for a principles/skills approach to interpersonal communication will be given.

A Principles/Skills Conceptual Framework

Communication is an organizational function. Stimuli are received intrapersonally, interpersonally and from an environment on which understandings about self, other and the environment are based. Understandings are then organized into relational patterns on which decisions for interaction are based. Skills influence the flow of stimuli within the person (intrapersonal communication) and accuracy of interpretation about the other person's world (interpersonal communication) in a situational setting (environment) which helps to define self and other characteristics and relationships.

Each person develops his/her own perception about the world--an individualization of perceptions about self, other and environment. These personal worlds are the only "real world" that exists to the individual. The intrapersonal communication process involves skills in ordering stimuli, assessing states-of-being and image building. This personal world formation can then be conveyed interpersonally to others and vice versa. The ordering and reordering of perceptions into meanings in one's life is the process of communication.

Interpersonal communication involves sharing--or manipulating or coercing--one person's organization of perceptions with another person. Much of what each personal world contains was taken from perceptions received from other individual personal worlds. Many skills influence the flow of stimuli between individuals as they try to exchange personal meanings with one another.

The need for order, development, and refinement of one's personal world is the intrinsic motivation for interaction. The elaboration of the relationships between self and other conditions--other people and concrete and abstract physical environmental properties--results in greater personal BEING. As individuals are able to elaborate/differentiate self, other and environment more completely, they can increase the size, shape and numbers of personal meanings within their private world. Correctly perceived phenomenal stimuli requires less re-ordering as personal worlds are developed. Skills have a major influence on "how" and "what" stimuli are perceived from a phenomenal field.

Principles are the descriptions of underlying interaction. Skills come out of principles. Principles usually give insight on how to develop skills to meet desired ends. Principles and skills which influence the

flow of stimuli within or between individuals need more attention for a better understanding of the communication process. Principles and skills that are identified need to be taught to individuals to give them greater power toward more effective understandings of self, others and relationships. Principles and skills can be taught. Teaching skills in a structured experiential setting are the focus of the remainder of this paper.

Teaching Skills in a Laboratory Setting

Each of thirteen skills will be presented to include a description of the skill, the influence it has on the flow of stimuli between and within individuals and some structured exercises for the skill development. Several of the following skills are processes of interaction that are taken for granted. By heightening awareness of the function, better utilization of the skill can be achieved. Some skills are cognitive processes that cannot be observed directly but can be better understood from a model perspective. All skills can be learned/taught. The order of presentation is not to be viewed sequentially in terms of importance or influence on process.

Creation of Meaning

This skill is the cognitive process of arranging and rearranging images an individual develops into patterns of relationship. Everyone creates meanings from perceptions about self, others and the environment. An awareness of this process gives an individual freedom to make changes. Individuals are not born with perceived relationships--meanings--and these can be re-ordered to enlarge or expand one's personal world. Awareness of this skill can also be used to gain appreciation and

understanding of another person if they are consciously perceived as processing stimuli they receive into personal meanings for their personal worlds.

A structured exercise in the laboratory to develop greater awareness of this skill is to have each lab member share specific personal meanings about his/her own life. Other lab group members are to look for similarities and differences between what has been shared and their own personal meanings. Reflection on how each person has processed their experiences to reach these personal meanings develops greater awareness of the creation of meaning skill/process.

This can be a good opener for a lab group experience under the heading of "Getting Acquainted" exercise. A suggested list of topics, feelings, ideas can be given from which to choose aspects of self to share with others. Dividing the group (six members and a facilitator make an ideal group) into dyads and rotating a couple times allows for good exchange. Total group discussion and exchange helps heighten the awareness of this skill.

Separation of Worlds

Separation of worlds is the process of separating stimuli into those categories in which it originates. Each individual receives stimuli, to be processed into images, from self, other and the environment. Stimuli from the self belong to the self. Stimuli from other individuals have their origins within those other individuals. Stimuli from the environment have their bases within the environment. Separation of worlds is the process of determining what belongs where--who has responsibility for originating what particular stimuli.

The influence of this principle upon the flow of stimuli within self

and between individuals is very great. An individual has direct control of internal stimuli--that from self. The individual has only indirect control--an influence--on stimuli that originates within another person. The individual has indirect control on environmental stimuli. As individuals come to realize where the origin of the stimuli rests, they can use their energies to process the stimuli more effectively. Too often an individual tries to take responsibility for stimuli that does not belong to oneself. At times individuals try to place responsibility on someone else where the origin is within oneself. These stimuli are not processed for congruent and/or complete images. Understandings about self and others are distorted.

As individuals develop the ability to separate worlds, they can make personal changes easier, they can recognize the uniqueness of their personal world as compared to other's personal worlds, and they can help others process their personal world thus having an influence on the stimuli. A brief example will illustrate this principle process. Mark blamed his sister-in-law, Mary, for the disruption in the family when she became engaged to Bret. Mary has felt both guilty and angry--guilty because of the change and turmoil in the family which came about the time of the engagement and angry because Mark accused her and he refused to meet her demands for change. Mary requested Bret, her husband, to straighten out Mark, the brother-in-law. Who owns what of the stimuli between and within self? How did each person perceive interaction at the time of the engagement? What was responsible for feelings? Who denied personal responsibilites and blamed others for their own creation of meaning about the situation? Who helps each other separate out individual responsibilities and make changes in currently perceived personal worlds? Each say they want to work through the stress in the relationship.

Until individuals can sort out what feelings and perceptions belong to whom, they cannot make appropriate changes in their personal worlds and interpersonal interactions. Denial of self responsibility and of one another's feelings and perceptions continues to cloud reconciliation and personal growth. Separation of worlds is a skill for personal growth and relationship enhancement.

A structured laboratory experience is to have the lab group members share "positive and negative" experiences from their personal worlds. This usually allows for two or three situations to be shared where members recognize similarity between the expressed experience and one in their own personal worlds. One of the objects of the lab is for the group members to separate their experiences out of the interaction and keep the focus remaining on the speaker's world. A second objective of the lab experience is to help group members respect personal feelings and perceptions. All too often when negative experiences are shared other group members want to have the speaker deny the painful feelings or perceptions--we are a society of fixer-up-ers. Rather than help a person process through their perceptions and feelings, individuals tend to manipulate and change another person's personal world. This is especially true, and harmful, when the other personal world is a vital part of the individual's interpersonal system network.

A third objective of this lab is to help group members build images about one another and/or up-date images they have about one another. In the sharing process individuals also come to understand themselves better--self disclosure via a medium of listeners--as skills are practiced which increase understanding. A fourth objective of this structured experience is for members to practice verification feedback which is another important skill in communication.

Verification Feedback

Verification feedback is the process of a listener (receiver) taking in stimuli from another person and interpreting this stimuli into images about that person's personal world and these images are then transmitted back to the speaker (sender) to gain a confirmation or clarification about the understanding the listener has about the speaker's personal world. A listener (receiver) may perceive non-verbal messages and life-element messages (a conceptual framework of a third level of message transmission beyond the scope of this paper) from which images can be created for feeding back for verification.

There are three objectives in the verification feedback process. The first objective is to gain confirmation and/or clarification about the images a listener develops about the speaker's world. This enhances understanding about the speaker for the listener's world. The images a listener develops about another person are then related for personal meanings about how that other person fits within the listener's world. The second objective is to allow the speaker to know what understanding the listener has about the shared aspects of the speaker's world. This influences the interaction by allowing the speaker to make judgements about the listener's understanding for sequential interaction. The third objective is for the added understanding both listener and speaker can have about the speaker's world. The listener is often in a position to help the speaker develop greater insights to self as non-verbal, life-element and verbal transmissions are interpreted into images for the speaker to respond to for confirmation and/or clarification.

The influence of the verification feedback skill has been implied. Correct understandings between individuals and within self are assured. More complete and congruent understandings develop as the speaker senses

the empathic interaction through the listener's use of verification feedback. The flow of stimuli becomes more congruent between the three levels of transmission--verbal, life-element and non-verbal--as understandings become more assured.

Most of the structured laboratory exercises allow for the use and development of verification feedback. In the sharing of "positive and negative" experiences from personal worlds, at least one group member feeds back images to the speaker for confirmation or clarification. Other lab group members are also encouraged to feedback images they created about the speaker's world. Through separation of worlds and verification feedback, greater personal meanings are shared in the creation of meaning process. Self and relationships are enriched.

Listening Skills

Listening skills are skills most often associated with interpersonal communication. There are two sets of these skills which have an influence on the flow of understanding between individuals. One set of skills is that of "barriers" which distort or diminish understandings. The other set is that of "facilitators" which amplify and give congruence to exchanges of understanding. Each set will be described separately.

Listening barriers to understanding. Many individuals are not aware that a major problem in their understandings of one another come out of barriers used in interaction with one another. Six barriers are associated with poor listening--intake of messages about the speaker's personal world. Awareness of these will help individuals counteract the negative influence these have on the understanding process. The six barriers are:
(1) Hearing but not listening, (2) Defending a personal position,

(3) Entrance into the conversation, (4) Being preoccupied, (5) Closed perspective about life, and (6) Giving advice. Each will be described briefly.

1. Hearing but not listening. This is like receiving stimuli but not understanding what it means. The listener is not using the skill of creation of meaning to convert the stimuli into images about the speaker's world but is just processing the sounds as organized noise. Listening implies understanding how the speaker's world is put together from his/her personal perspective.

2. Defending a personal position. This barrier is used when the listener feels threatened or challenged by something from the speaker's world. When individuals are defensive, they are not separating worlds, they do not allow the other person to own his/her perceptions. This is a very hard barrier to overcome--especially if the speaker is imputing the feelings or perceptions onto the listener.

3. Entrance into the conversation. Too often a listener wants to be understood and jumps into the conversation without listening to the speaker's messages. This barrier is different from defending a position in that there isn't a challenge or a threat perceived by the listener. However, both have the same net effect: attention is turned to the listener's world by the listener and understanding of the speaker's world is minimized and/or distorted.

4. Being preoccupied. In this barrier the listener is concerned with messages within his/her personal world and/or the environment and cannot direct energy to understanding the speaker's world. This becomes a barrier in that understanding does not take place and the

lack of understanding reduces the amount and quality of messages transmitted by the speaker.

5. Closed perspective about life. This barrier involves the skills of creation of meaning, separation of worlds and verification feedback. The listener has no room for understanding a perceived world that does not fit his/her own perception of the "real world." Loss of understanding, and appreciating, the uniqueness of another individual is apparent. An opprotunity to exchange meanings for growth and change is lost for both listener/speaker in this interaction.

6. Giving advice. Many individuals do not want to admit that giving advice is a barrier to understanding. Advice comes out of the world of the sender (the intended listener). An individual can help another person sort through alternatives and see consequences of choices which keep the focus on that person's private world. Advice is a put down of the speaker by the listener.

A major skill in the listening process is an awareness of when a barrier exists that has a negative influence on understanding the other person and making a change in the interaction. There hasn't been a particular structured laboratory experience set up for this but one written assignment has each group member making a charting of barriers used in interactions that impede an effective listening process. This assignment has a carry over into the lab interactions which are filled with opportunities to be aware of the barrier's negative influence.

A second major skill in the listening process is an awareness of facilitators that can be used to increase understandings and make

application of these. Learning this skill is similar to that of decreasing barrier influence.

Listening facilitators to understanding. There are five facilitators that have a positive influence on understanding one another. These five facilitators are: (1) Acceptance of the speaker, (2) Offering silence, (3) Offering a listener's response, (4) Using verification feedback, and (5) Checking out impressions.

1. Acceptance of the speaker. This facilitator implies finding out "how" the speaker's world is put together and supporting the speaker's intent within that personal world. It involves respecting the rights of that person to perceive and feel and be a unique individual. Feeling understood is the first step for a speaker toward changing or re-ordering of a personal meaning, if that is what is desired.

2. Offering silence. Offering silence is much different than being silent. Offering silence has the listener's attention focused on the speaker's world through receiving additional stimuli from non-verbal and life-element transmission and/or a re-ordering of images about the size and shape of the speaker's world while he/she is sorting through personal thoughts and feelings. Being silent is an act of the listener being in his/her own world and not being supportive of the speaker's world.

3. Offering a listener's response. This is the process of validating the worth of the speaker but keeping the focus on the speaker's world. Expression of appreciation for the speaker sharing particular thoughts or feelings is validating that personal world.

4. Using verification feedback. This is a particular skill itself to be worked on. It can be done at three levels: Parroting,

paraphrasing and personal essence. Parroting is a repeat of messages without image formation about the speaker's world. Paraphrasing develops an image based on "content" messages. Personal essence involves the "relational" messages along with "content" and other unexpressed feelings and perceptions.

5. Checking out impressions. Listeners receive impressions about the speaker's world which need to be checked out with the speaker. These impressions are often the source of important aspects about an individual's world that is hard for that person to share verbally. The listener can help the speaker get in touch with his/her own world much easier as these impressions are checked out.

Speaking Skills

Speaking skills are another major part of the interpersonal communication process--that of verbally transmitting aspects of one's personal perceptions to other individuals. There are also two sets of these skills which have an influence on how the speaker's world is received and perceived by the intended listeners for understanding. The "barrier" set of interactions are those behaviors which distort the quality and quantity of the messages received by the listener. The "facilitator" set of interactions help the listener to gain a greater understanding about the speaker's world.

Speaking barriers to understanding. The speaking barriers used in interaction have an influence on how complete, correct and congruent the understanding is for the listener about the speaker's world. Unintended use of the barriers interfere with the understanding as much as intended barriers. An awareness of what barriers are and how they operate is

important for the development of a skill to reduce their influence in interpersonal communication. Five barriers are described at this time: (1) Imbalanced relationship, (2) Mode of delivery, (3) Inappropriate assumptions, (4) Disowned responsibility, and (5) Incomplete and incongruent messages. These barriers are not all the barriers to speaking nor are they all used in each relationship a speaker has with different listeners in interpersonal encounter. They do represent some areas of distortion of the speaker's meaning for understanding on the listener's side.

1. Imbalanced relationship. A barrier to understanding is set up when the speaker is in either a superior or inferior position to the listener. The "content" of the messages being transmitted are counteracted by the struggle for balancing the relationship. Assuming a superior or inferior position is a manipulation of the listener and the speaker's messages become distorted.

2. Mode of delivery. This barrier directly influences the flow of stimuli from speaker to listener: too fast or slow, too loud or soft. Each quality of message transmission puts a strain on the listener while trying to perceive the speaker's intended meanings. This barrier shows up more often in relationships with three or more individuals interacting but can cause distortion whenever it is used.

3. Inappropriate assumptions. Too often a speaker in transmitting his/her world is caught up in it and does not take the listener's previous understanding into consideration when sharing current perceptions. The speaker needs to check out once in a while to see if the listener is understanding.

4. Disowned responsibility. This becomes a very distorting influence on understanding the speaker's world because the disowned perceptions

or feelings are usually imputed upon the listener. The listener in turn tries to sort them out in his/her world and they don't belong there. No one processes these messages correctly or completely.

5. Incomplete and incongruent messages. This barrier happens too often in many interpersonal relationships. Lack of complete verbal transmissions of a speaker's world requires the listener to draw assumptions in order to make a complete image about the speaker. These assumptions may not be correct. Incongruent messages are baffling to the listener's interpretation about the speaker's world.

There isn't a particular structured laboratory experience set up to work on speaking barriers or facilitators. Every lab interaction allows for opportunity to be aware of the barriers and facilitators that influence the understandings listeners develop about the speaker's world. Awareness of the barriers and facilitators comes through class discussion and written assignments.

Speaking facilitators to understanding. The speaker, who understands that being understood by the listener is dependent upon how his/her messages are transmitted, is in a position to facilitate that understanding by way of message transmission. There are four facilitators of message transmission that will help assure a more complete, correct and congruent understanding about the speaker's world by the listener. These facilitators are: (1) Prefacing threatening messages, (2) Accepting responsibility, (3) Asking to be understood, and (4) Speaking vis-a-vis the relationship.

1. Prefacing threatening messages. Most speakers are somewhat aware of changes they have made in perception or feeling that do not fit into the image the listener has about them. These transmissions of

"new" messages about self need to be prefaced so that the listener doesn't become defensive, or as defensive as without a preface. If there is a question on how the listener might respond to a speaker's message, prefacing the messages will assure better understanding.

2. Accepting responsibility. As the speaker takes ownership of feelings/thoughts/perceptions and transmits them in that manner, the listener can better understand the speaker's world. Even in persuasive messages, the speaker needs to have ownership of the message and then help the listener see the value a similiar feeling/action/perspective would have in his/her life.

3. Asking to be understood. This may require the speaker to ask the listener for undivided attention and/or to feedback what the speaker has said from the listener's point of view. If the listener has understood the speaker's world, that understanding can be confirmed or clarified when necessary.

4. Speaking vis-a-vis the relationship. Speakers have both the right and requirement to share perceptions from their personal worlds. Relationships can only develop on understandings about one another and decisions on how to act are based on those understandings. Misunderstandings lead to inappropriate decisions but these inappropriate decisions become the bases for relationship development. Each member of the relationship has the right and responsibility to share personal meanings for relationship growth.

There is one structured laboratory experience where the listening and speaking processes of perceiving and transmitting stimuli between members takes place. Focus is not on the barriers of facilitators, per se, but a special emphasis is placed on understanding the interchange process. The

structure of this lab is where individual members prepare to share their personal perceptions about other group members in ways of how they communicate effectively and in ways they could work on particular skills for enrichment of relationship interaction. Specific skills are the bases of the observations. A target person is selected who becomes a stimulus for other member's responses. A message processing person is selected to assure feedback and clarification to speaker's responses about the target person. The target person may respond after other individuals have shared their perceptions.

Speaker's responses about the target person are to include how the specific observations--areas of communication effectiveness and enrichment--relate to the personal world of each speaker. The message processor feeds back the interpreted images about the target person as related to the speaker's world for confirmation or clarification. The message processor atts as a proxy for the target person, who is not to respond until all other members have transmitted their perceptions and received verification feedback through the message processor. The target person may, or may not, sit within the group interaction. The choice is up to the person. Each person does sit where they can hear the speaker responses and message processor's feedback interaction. The target person may jot down points on which to respond when his/her turn comes.

Relationship Assessment

Relationship assessment is a skill used to help determine the relational feelings each person has about self, other and the relationship, per se. It becomes an exercise of stating how one is feeling toward self, other and the relationship OR, if the current feelings are not desired ones, the stating of how the person would like to be feeling towards self,

other and the relationship.

The influence this skill has in the interaction is to help free-up perceptions about self, other and relationships that are negative and to reaffirm good feelings about self, other and relationships during smooth, positive periods. The "content" of interaction is about the "relational" aspects of the interaction. All too often negative relational messages get attached to the "content" messages of the individuals. The relational stresses are battled out in "content" areas without a clear understanding of where the battle lies. Only by directing content to the relational feelings can this type of interaction be cleared up. On the other hand, positive relational messages also need to be transmitted periodically to give support to individual and relationship growth and development.

The structured lab experience is to have each member write out--as part of the pre-lab preparation--his/her feelings about self and other as related to their relationship within the lab setting. Individuals are then paired up with a chance to work in dyads to express their perception and interact within content messages about relational feelings. Members are then re-paired with another partner to experience at least two rounds of this interaction. Later the group members may respond about themselves and the lab group collectively if they choose to make these responses.

Assessing States-of-Being

The skill of assessing states-of-being is to work on checking out impressions about another person's state of being.

Often impressions are received but not checked out or acted upon. Important messages about one's life and interaction are not used to benefit individuals and/or relationships. Impressions often involve situations where feelings need to be processed within the person. Seldom

do individuals ask someone else to help them process the pressures or concerns they are feeling but impressions are received through life-element levels of message transmission that are important to process.

Members of the lab groups prepare themselves for this experience by reflectively assessing what is going on in their awareness a couples times before lab. Then each person uses about a five minute period to assess the current state of being at the beginning of lab. A focus person is selected and that person continues to be aware of his/her state-of-being. Other lab group members then allow impressions about that person to develop within themselves as they focus on that person. The focus person does not speak until every other lab group member has expressed all their impressions. The focus person then can respond to the correctness/incorrectness of the impression and/or other responses about self or the process. Each lab group member has the experience of being the focus person.

Intrapersonal Dimensions of Being Assessment

The skill of assessing dimensions of being is an intrapersonal skill. This skill is directed toward individuals assessing the "hows" and "whats" of their personal worlds. Eight dimensions have been defined as important indicators of the "hows" and "whats" in one's life. These eight dimensions are not mutually exclusive nor intended to be all inclusive. However, they are relatively easy ways to assess one's personal being. The eight dimensions are: (1) to love, (2) to be loved, (3 & 4) to feel competent and worthwhile to self and others, (5 & 6) open communication in sending and receiving personal messages, (7) sense of direction, and (8) sense of self control.

Each individual does sense a feeling of well being or not-so-well being. The eight dimensions of being are ways to see where the well being/not-so-well being are met with satisfaction/fulfillment in terms of expectations about life. As individuals start to use this skill to tune into these areas, they find they can make changes which influence the satisfaction/fulfillment of these areas of being. A sense of well being in turn influences what individuals transmit about a personal world and whether or not they can separate their world to be able to understand another person's world. Individuals who find one or more areas in the dimensions of being less than satisfactorily fulfilled are open to be challenged by all types of stimuli from others and/or the environment. Conflicts arise during times of low fulfillment--lack of well being. The skill of being aware of one's dimensions of being and acting upon areas of needed/desired change would free up much of the contesting that goes on in relationship and in intrapersonal conflicts.

The laboratory exercise is one where the group members can choose to talk about their perceived levels of satisfaction/fulfillment in any one of these areas. They may also choose to express how they are perceiving influences in their interactions to result in the perceived degree of well being. A second area can be expressed as time permits. Other group members can practice other communication skills as they interact with the speaker about his/her dimensions of being.

Relationship Resolution

Relationship resolution is the skill of resolving relational strain between individuals in the relationship. Sensing the stress or strain in the relationship and purposefully processing the feelings is an important skill.

Many blockages come into relationships because of differences in perceptions about one another or issue concerns. Stress/strain is introduced into the interaction. The stress/strain continues distorting understandings about one another and the issue (content) that is being processed. As individuals learn to make relationship resolutions, they find a new freedom in interacting with one another. There are eight principles of relationship resolution that can be used to bring resolution to the contesting in the relationship or that can help reduce situations in which contesting of one another may arise. They are: (1) Validating the relationship, (2) Organizing messages, (3) Involving partner, (4) Seeking understanding, (5) Being a positive example, (6) Handling offenses, (7) Adding support through touch, and (8) Accepting reconciliation. Each will be briefly described.

Validating the relationship. Validating the relationship is placing the emphasis upon the importance of the relationship over the content of what needs to be shared or discussed. The relationship with the other person is what makes the feeling/perception/decision important for being shared. Validating the relationship is important when the other individual may be perceived as having a different perspective. The validation of the importance of the relationship may be followed by a "preface to a threatening message" before the speaker shares his/her personal world.

Organizing messages. Organizing messages is the process of taking into account how the other person may respond to the messages and presenting them with personal ownership and in the best possible way for the other individual to be able to separate worlds and understand the speaker's world.

Involving partner. Involving the partner in the problem the speaker perceives and not in the perceived solution to the problem goes a long way in decreasing defensiveness and/or reducing the chance for contesting to build between partners. Too often an individual dumps the solution on the partner rather than working with the partner to find alternatives to the problem. Several times the partner is not directly involved in the problem until the solution is stated which usually includes change on the partner's interactions.

Seeking understanding. Seeking understanding can come before or after contesting arises. In either case the individuals can talk about principles and skills that will help assure the greatest understanding about each other's world. Talking about the desire to understand and being understood is also important in achieving understanding.

Being a positive example. Being a positive example does two things in the relationship. It helps to set an appropriate climate for understanding one another and it gives a model for skills the partner can use to help assure understanding. These skills may be talked about and/or exhibited in interactions.

Handling offenses. When an individual feels offended, he/she places the other person in jail. Resentment, fear, anger and other feelings arise within the offended person. To justify one's position of jailor, the individual continues perceiving actions on the part of the prisoner to keep them in jail. Contesting in the relationship does not stop until offenses are cleared up. Finding out the intent of the action of the sender which was perceived by the receiver as offensive is an important way to resolve this relational impasse. All too often perceptions of

the receiver do not fit with the intent of the sender but offenses arise that need processing. If a person senses he/she is in jail, he/she may go to the prison guard (jailor) to see what offense was perceived. Forgiveness of one another is also important in removing residues of resentment, bitterness or other negative feelings. The offended asks forgiveness from the perceived offender for the feelings he/she developed toward the perceived offender and the perceived offender seeks forgiveness for actions that were perceived as offensive. Many relationships are ruined by inappropriate processing of offenses.

Supporting through touch. Touch as related to relationship resolution does three things: First, it becomes a guage as to the readiness for processing feelings. If either party is not ready to offer a hand of friendship, one, or both, need more private time in sorting through their worlds. Second, it draws attention to the importance of the relationship, per se. The relationship is more important than an incident based in misunderstandings. Third, it conveys a message of care and concern that helps one another process inner feelings and reduces feelings about reacting to one another's actions/reactions.

Accepting reconciliation. Accepting reconciliation implies a willingness for one or more of the individuals to own inappropriate actions/reactions and then work toward constructive change. Denial of action/reaction blocks a process of free flow of messages within and/or between individuals which undermines a relationship.

The skill of relationship resolution is assessing stresses or strains within the relationship, or chances for contesting, and working with one's partner(s) to remove that barrier in the relationship. There is no

structured laboratory experience set up to have lab group members work through relational stresses but there is encouragement to use any of the eight principles of relationship resolution within the lab setting and/or outside the lab setting for relationship resolution. There is a written assignment that lab group members do to work toward relationship resolution with someone in their current interactions.

Conflict Resolution Skill

A conflict resolution model was developed to give a process toward working through conflicting situations. A set of procedures (steps) were developed to help assure resolution at a cause level of interaction rather than at a symptom level of interaction. The conflict resolution procedures work on interpersonal conflicts, intrapersonal conflicts and in problem solving situations.

Conflict is the most dehabilitating interaction individuals experience in relationships. Positive messages are easily experienced and expressed. Negative messages stop the flow of understanding and leave the participants isolated from others and unable to process efficiently their private worlds. Developing a skill for conflict resolution is a very important way to free-up time, energy and human dignity in relationships. Six procedural steps in the conflict resolution model will be discussed briefly. The use of these constitutes a communication skill. The use of this conflict resolution skill also presupposes ability to use the other skills that have been identified in the paper. The six steps are: (1) Recognizing conflict at content or relational levels, (2) Setting an appropriate time, (3) Associating issue and/or relational feelings to dimensions of being, (4) Understanding separate worlds through verification feedback, (5) Seeking alternatives, and (6) Implementing and evaluating the alternative actions.

Recognizing conflict at a content or relational level. Conflicts can be recognized at an issue or content level where individuals perceive different alternatives to meet desired ends; or, conflicts can be recognized as relational contesting of one another that eventually will result in an issue coming into focus. Issues are viewed as symptoms of the conflict in this model and the individual's inability to process differences of perception are viewed as the causes of the contesting of one another. Conflicts, the contesting of one another, can be resolved before an issue becomes the focus of the interaction as individuals learn to sense relationship stress. Knowing what level of interaction is involved is an important part of making change. Relational stress is always involved and relationship resolution is an important consideration.

Setting an appropriate time. During the heighth of emotional interaction is not the most efficient time to process differences in perception and/or feelings about one another. Setting an appropriate time allows individuals to sort through their own feelings, reflect on a partner's perceptions, and prepare for the most efficient way to bring understanding.

Associating issue and/or relational feelings to dimensions of being. This step in the conflict resolution procedures is based on the assumption that unfulfilled dimensions of being reduce the individual's ability to process messages from another person and/or stimuli from an environment. Defensiveness builds within the individual and reactions increase until contesting takes place. To discover which dimensions of being are unfulfilled allows for fulfillment and/or control of that intrapersonal process interaction within the relationship. Partners can find

associations between their feelings and the issues with their dimensions of being. They can also reflect on unfulfilled dimensions of being in the partner.

Understanding separate worlds through verification feedback. The feedback process is to give clarity to unfulfilled needs and separate perceptions about alternatives for issues. Once the members of the relationship feel understood, they are ready to look at alternatives.

Seeking alternatives. Alternatives are sought for issues in a problem solving mode. The contesting of one another is gone and the alternative that best fits the situation becomes the one that is chosen to act upon. Alternatives to help individual members find fulfillment in areas of dimension of being are also determined. These alternatives are important in regulating the occurrence of contesting interactions in the present and future encounters.

Implementing and evaluating the alternative actions. Plans are made on how to implement alternatives for the problem solving concerns (issues) and for fulfillment of dimensions of being. A reasonable time is set to evaluate the alternatives as meeting the desired ends or for setting new ones.

The conflict resolution model can be used in a problem solving situation. The use of the steps helps assure understanding of the issues and the dimensions of being for each indiviudal vis-a-vis the issues. The laboratory experience is set up where members of the group pre-plan what dimension of being they would like to find greater fulfillment in vis-a-vis the lab group and think of at least one alternative the group could do

to bring about the increased fulfillment. Group members are paired and they share as their input to the process of the problem solving situation their desired activity as the issue. They then follow the first five steps of the model. They are paired with a second group member and follow the same procedure. Then all group members look at dimensions of being and seek an activity to help all meet the desired ends. The next lab session becomes step six. They implement and evaluate their actions.

Sense of Timing

The last of the thirteen major skills is that of a sense of timing. A sense of timing is knowing what to do when under varying situations. Should the individual speak or listen? Offer verification feedback or silence? Add support through touch or allow personal time and space?

Learning to use the right skill at the right time is the key to successful human interaction. Awareness about the various skills and the influence they have on sequential interactions is important.

There are no lab experiences to specifically practice this skill. Each lab has an analysis of interaction at the close and a sense of timing can be discussed and brought before group members. The lab facilitator--an individual who has usually experienced the lab interaction at a previous time--can often call attention to the skill of a sense of timing when various skills are used appropriately or inappropriately within the interaction. Post analysis by individual group members can include their reflections upon the appropriate use of the various skills within the situational interactions.

Conclusion

Communication skills are important functions in the processing of

understanding between individuals and within the individual. An understanding of how each skill influences the flow of stimuli within or between individuals is the first step in purposeful action toward skill development/refinement. A laboratory experience where structured interactions focus on particular skills is also important for skill development/refinement.

Thirteen major skills have been defined, briefly discussed and laboratory exercises for some have been given. Art Bochner (1978) indicates the need to identify skills that have an influence on interpersonal communication in a variety of situations. These thirteen skills have the same influence on the process of understanding one another whether the relationship be within the family, the business field, the classroom, or with casual acquaintances. The type of relationship will influence the amount of energy needed and the commitment level given to processing understandings between one another. A sense of timing is as important in an interpersonal relationship in business as it is in a counseling interaction. Separation of worlds is as important for an employee/employer as it is for a husband/wife or parent/child. Each skill has its influence on the interaction whether it be between friends or enemies, for the rich or the poor. Understanding the skill's influence and developing one's ability to use the skills are areas where speech communication teachers can have a large influence on the quality of life for many human beings.

I would be happy to correspond with anyone who has similar interests or concerns.

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